

# Challenges, Tensions and Barriers to Emancipatory Models of Student Voice



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# The politics of 'participation'

## **Managerial / undemocratic**

a form of power that  
'...attempts to "involve"  
workers in production  
without giving up any  
real authority on the  
part of management'  
(Egan 1990, p. 68)

used in business, industry,  
'development' work and the  
arts to create the *sense* of  
ownership, increase 'buy-in'  
and minimise need for overt  
discipline and control in  
implementing agendas

## **Collective governance/ democratic**

a form of governance  
that is characteristic  
of democratically-run  
organisations where  
members have  
different degrees of  
creative and decision-  
making power, but all  
contribute to  
collective governance

## **Co-intentional / radically democratic**

ongoing co-production  
where those involved,  
'through common  
reflection and action,  
discover themselves as  
permanent re-creators'  
of knowledge, forms of  
organisation and  
society

'not pseudo-participation, but  
committed involvement'  
(Freire 1970, p. 69)

Most universities are organised to limit these forms of  
participation – hence, they are particularly political here.

# **The concept of education as a community and universities as service-providers has been historically produced and at all stages resisted**

- 1968: being 'inefficient by normal commercial or industrial standards', universities would 'have to come to terms with the age-old conflict between democratic principles and effective government' ([Tyzack Report](#))
- 1985: universities are 'first and foremost corporate enterprises to which subsidiary units and individual academics are responsible and accountable' (Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principles, [\*Report of the Steering Committee for Efficiency Studies in Universities\*](#))

# Participation and student voice



- Plannas et al, (2013, p582) suggest that:  
*“student participation in the governance and functioning of the university, as well as being a right, is also a powerful educational process that can be used at different stages of university life as a primary complement to students’ education and professionalisation.”*
- Bragg, (2007) identifies that student voice is optimistic, unquestioning and welcoming as a new enlightenment and readiness to share power with students.

# Participation and student voice



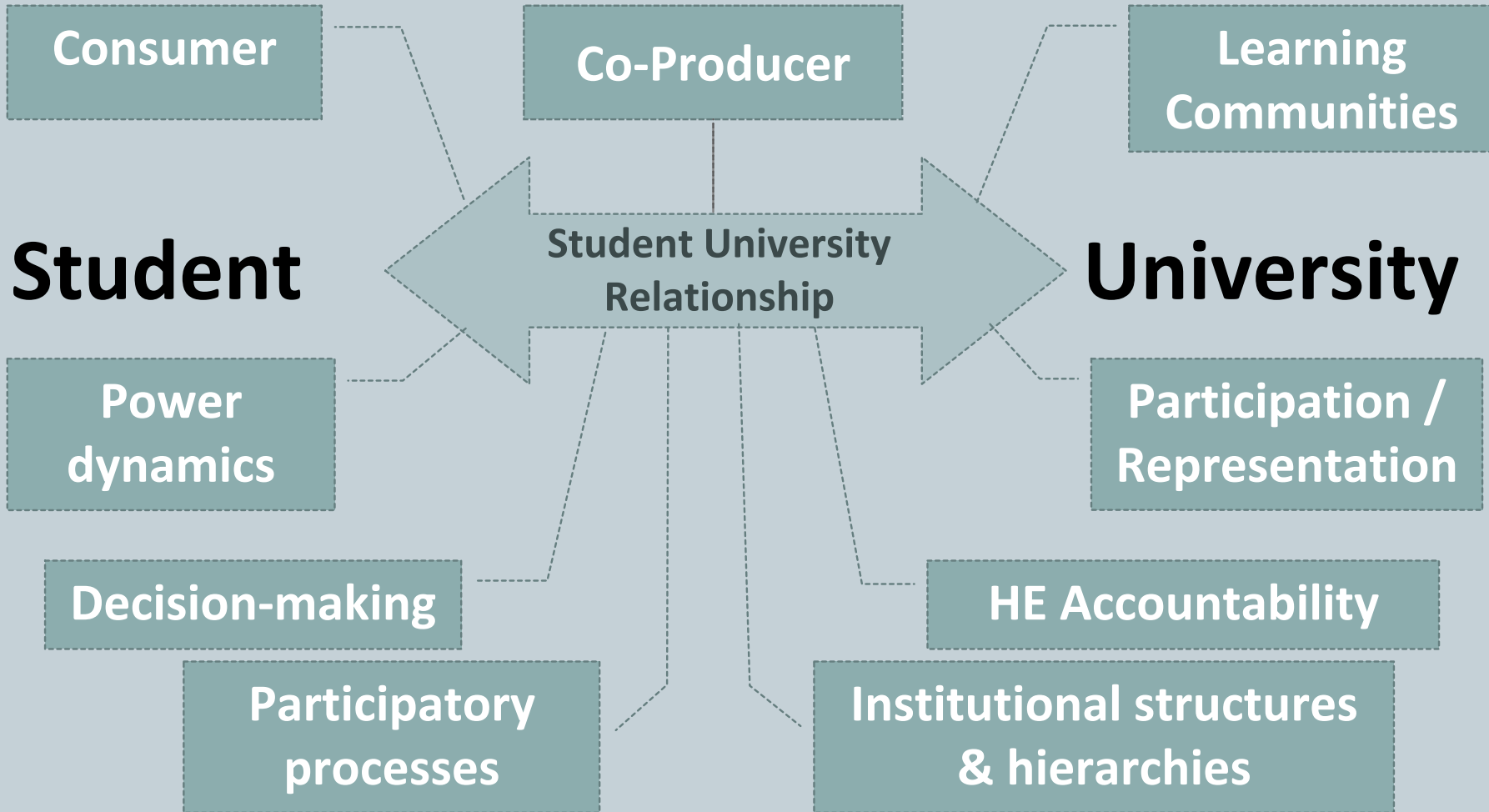
- Cook-Sather, (2006) believes students should be afforded the opportunity to actively shape their education.
- Little et al, (2009) believes that the value of involving students to improve teaching and learning needs to be a shared endeavour.

# Critiques to participation and student voice



- Feminist critiques have questioned the hidden coercion in 'voice'.
- Liberation of the 'student voice' assumes a collective experience among members (Cook-Sather, 2006).
- It is important to recognise and acknowledge how hard it is to learn from voices we do not hear (Bragg, 2001 in Bragg, 2007) and to learn from voices we do not know how to hear (Cook-Sather, 2006).
- The invitation of the student voice welcomes selective inhabitants of the margin on order to better exclude the margin (Spivak in Orner, 1992, p. 87 in Cook-Sather, 2006) .

# Models of student voice



# ‘Contrasting approaches to student voice’

Adapted from Michael Fielding, ‘The voice of students in an inclusive school’ (2010)

High-performance learning organisation	Person-centred learning community	Democratic fellowship
The personal for the sake of the functional (people used for institution)	The functional for the sake of the personal (institution serves individuals)	The political for the sake of the personal (co-operation to make institution reflect and serve needs of democratic life)
<u>Student voice: how &amp; why</u> Wide-ranging formal and informal consultation making current arrangements more effective	<u>Student voice: how &amp; why</u> Wide-ranging formal and informal mutual engagement to develop wise persons	<u>Student voice: how &amp; why</u> Shared responsibility for and commitment to the common good
<u>Relationships</u> Instrumental use of trust and relationships	<u>Relationships</u> Mutual trust, care and respect	<u>Relationships</u> Shared commitment to deepen democratic living and learning together



# Transformation



- Transformative emancipatory approaches to ‘student voice’ require us to address:
  - what it means to be a student;
  - what education means and includes and is for;
  - the structure and organisation of universities to enable democratic practices.

# Key Issues for consideration



- What are the current practices in your own institutions?
- Are there real possibilities for democratizing governance in your own institutions?

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